

Appreciating Our Winter Wonderland

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Durango and the surrounding area offer many recreational activities in the winter. From ice climbing to skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing and snowmobiling, you can do it all in our little corner of the world. While some of these activities are faster-paced than others, try to take some time this winter to slow down and appreciate our natural winter wonderland.

There are countless natural things you can appreciate in the outdoors this winter, if you're willing to look. One thing that may be somewhat difficult to see other times of the year, unless the ground is wet and muddy, are animal tracks. Tracks of the snowshoe hare, for example, can typically be seen, even when the hare itself may be camouflaged with its new coat of winter white fur. Because hares hop by landing with their back feet in front of their front feet, their tracks will show two large, long track impressions in front of two smaller, off-set tracks. If you're lucky, you could even see some tracks of the Canada lynx, re-introduced to Colorado in 1999. Lynx tracks are quite large ñ about five inches across, compared to only 2 to 3 inches across for a bobcat. In fact, lynx tracks are about the same size as a female mountain lion! If you look carefully, you may even be able to see some small mouse tracks on the snow as well.

Although winter is not a time that many people think of to look for birds, there can still be plenty of bird watching around. Many birds, such as pine siskins and juncos, can be more easily seen at the lower elevations they migrate to this time of year. Winter can also be a nice time to spot raptors in trees that have lost their leaves. Bald eagles can be found next to areas of open water earlier in the winter. Raptors such as red-tailed hawks, and even smaller ones like kestrels can be found in trees, watching the ground for the movement of a mouse or other small animal below.

When was the last time you really looked at the trees you are using as ski obstacles when you're flying down the slopes? You're probably cruising around some gorgeous evergreens like subalpine fir (short, flat, smooth needles), Engelmann spruce (soft, square

needles), Colorado blue spruce (found at lower elevations than Engelmann spruce), or even some aspens with their gray bark complementing the winter white background.

One way to get the most out of your outdoor recreational and natural experience is to join with some San Juan Mountains Association/DMR volunteer ski or snowshoe naturalists at Durango Mountain Resort. Ski naturalist treks take place every Sunday throughout the season, and snowshoe treks can be arranged for individuals or groups. Call DMR Guest Services to make arrangements at 385-2147

Next time you're riding the chairlift, about to start up your snowmobile, or putting on your snowshoes, stop and take a moment to take in the beauty of winter in southwest Colorado. You'll be glad you did.

By Gabi Morey, Education Outreach Director for San Juan Mountains Association

* Preparing for Hunting Season / by Alan Peterson/*

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As rifle hunting season quickly approaches, the San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA) reminds everyone that preparation is essential for a safe and enjoyable experience.

/Photo by SJMA Durango VIS Mark Winkworth./* SJMA Visitor Information Specialist provides two archery hunters with information at the San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC). The SJPLC is a combined National Forest, BLM and SJMA service-first office, providing visitors with information, maps, guidebooks, OHV Registrations and agency permits for Public Lands of Southwest Colorado.*

Contacting the San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC), a combined San Juan National Forest, Bureau of Land Management and SJMA visitor front desk at (970) 247-4874 <javascript:void(0)> is a good resource to have a lot of your questions answered, from the weather and terrain, to road quality and accessibility. Road and campground closures are also posted on www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan>. The Outdoor Recreation Hotline at 970-247-8187 <javascript:void(0)> offers recorded updates weekly on recreation opportunities to special restrictions and closure updates.* *

Off-highway-vehicles (OHV) are a popular way to travel in the backcountry during hunting season, but do you know where you can use one? The San Juan National Forest Map sells for \$7.00 and depicts the travel management (available at www.sjma.org <file:///C:/Documents and Settings/Owner/My Documents/My Webs/myweb/>).

OHV registrations are also required for residents or non-residents who are not registered in their home state. Nonresidents have to bring proof of their registration with their title. The cost is \$15.25 and registrations are available at your Public Lands Offices in Durango, Bayfield, and Pagosa Springs, some local OHV dealers, as well as Navajo State Park.

Remember that firearms must be fully unloaded in both the magazine and chamber as well as fully enclosed in a hard or soft case with no open ends, when riding on an OHV. Also, firearms may not be discharged in or near a campground and must always be in plain site.

Camping outside of developed campgrounds is allowed on both National Forest and BLM lands unless otherwise posted. Please camp at least 100 feet from any source of water. You must keep vehicles within 300 feet of the roads when accessing your camp. On the San Juan National Forest and BLM lands, it is prohibited to camp for more than 28 days within a continuous 60-day period. After 14 days, you must move your camp or equipment beyond a 3-mile radius from the previous site.

Hunters who camp with stock on public lands must use State Certified Noxious Weed-free hay, straw or mulch with marked verification, steamed rolled grain, or cubed or palletized feed made from certified weed-free hay.

Each year Agency staff, SJMA staff, and volunteers come together in a tent outside of the Colorado Division of Wildlife office in Durango to provide public land information, safety tips in the backcountry, camping and road updates and sell Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) registrations, maps and guidebooks to encourage prepared and safe hunting practices in the backcountry. Look for us outside the DOW office on October 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, and November 2 and 3.

According to CDOW Area Wildlife Manager Pat Dorsey, "Hunters get good information at the booth on where to camp, LNT camping, weed-free hay requirements, trail closures and more. I am convinced that more-educated hunters are better hunters. And, I don't think that many drive the miles they do to get to our beautiful state to intentionally break the law."

/ "Eyes in the Forest" /Hotline/ / continues again this year during rifle hunting season to encourage safety in the backcountry and to

encourage everyone to protect their public lands. Just phone 385-1234 <javascript:void(0)> for a 24-hour recording where you can leave a message.

Wallet-sized Hunting Date Cards are available at all of our Public Land offices on the San Juan National Forest that offer hunting season dates, allowing recreationists and other public land multiple users to be familiar with dates that they should wear 500 square inches of blaze-orange.

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